

A SPEECH

BY

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I would like to thank the Chairman for inviting me to address this conference on Energy and Northern Development.

I feel that Canadians should be looking at an energy policy for Northern Canada from a different perspective than will probably be presented by other speakers later this morning.

Let me state from the beginning that I feel very strongly--and I have never found anything to contradict this belief--that the people of the North should be looking to develop renewable natural resources. We should not wait for the oil companies to take away our non-renewable resources. If we do, the people of the North will eventually be left with nothing and our land, in many areas, will be useless.

Who is going to benefit from the McKenzie River Pipeline that so many special interest groups are committed to having built? The Canadian people?

The main purpose of the Pipeline is to move Alaskan gas to the United States. But the shipment of Alaskan gas from Prudhoe Bay is dependent on the rate at which oil can be extracted. This means that it will be mainly Canadian gas that will be shipped through the pipeline in the early stages. We would be selling Canadian gas to American consumers yet we are not certain of our country's energy needs for the near future.

From the figures that I have been able to get, Canada only has, at the very most, some seven trillion cubic feet of gas in the Arctic--the Americans have 34 trillion feet. My estimates rely on the figures presented by the oil companies themselves. How much the Canadian public can believe these figures any more is a question I would rather not go into this morning.

However, even using the estimates of the oil companies, I cannot help but conclude that by the time the Prudhoe Bay gas starts to move, we Canadians will--quite literally--have run out of gas. Canadians will then either have to do without gas or buy it from the Americans--that is, if the United States wants to sell it to us.

With the world market the way it now is, the Americans might not even have any left for us later. As they have done throughout their history, the American government will go to great effort to protect their own resources. Canadians can be sure of that.

As we have all seen in the last year, the oil policies established by the Canadian government in the early 1970's--policies that promised a virtual land of milk and honey for the North--have been completely torn to shreds. A series of articles in the Toronto Star by David Crane last fall showed the total inadequacy of the federal government's planning in embarrassing detail.

The government's oil policies were based on the estimates of the oil companies--estimates which the government took at face value (or "hook, line and sinker" as we say up North). As far as many of us in the North can see, the only government policy at present is to wait for the oil companies to come up with a new set of estimates. (Maybe some of the speakers will enlighten us later this morning.)

The question remains, if neither the Canadian government nor the oil companies are sure of their estimates for justifying the building of the McKenzie River Pipeline, what benefits can the Canadian public forward to? The only fact that Canadians can be sure of today is that the oil is still in the ground and that it is still a Canadian asset.

The New Democratic Party has taken the position that Canada should reduce our present exports of gas to the United States. We should also concentrate on the exploration and development of our natural gas reserves in the settled regions of Canada. In this way we would be sure to meet Canadian needs for many years and it would give us time to assess other options.

One option is investigating the re-development of the coal industry as many European countries have been doing since 1973. Canada has huge deposits of coal; they are located in settled area. In many of these areas, such as in the Maritimes, they would create badly needed jobs. It would also make Canada self-sufficient in energy at less cost to the Canadian taxpayer.

We should take it as a basic truism that the purpose of an energy policy for Canada is to provide energy to the Canadian public in all parts of Canada at the lowest price possible. Canadian energy policy does not mean that the Canadian public must only cater to the interests of the oil industry. If the oil industry can no longer meet Canada's energy needs efficiently and at reasonable costs, then it is the obligation of Canadian public officials--federal and provincial--to look elsewhere.

Canadians are accustomed in self-sufficiency in coping with our environment. We have coped with it throughout our history on this continent. We should expect--even demand--that the Canadian government do the same.

New options and policies can be far less expensive in supplying Canadian energy needs. Yet the federal government is not providing research money to investigate new energy alternatives nor is there any indication that the government ever intends to do so.

Instead, from all indications, the federal government is allowing itself to be stampeded by an American-dominated consortium into building a multi-billion dollar pipeline. So committed the federal government has become, it refuses to find out whether this is the best means of supplying energy at reasonable prices to Canadians. The government also refuses to investigate whether other alternatives will better meet the energy needs of the Canadian public in all regions of the country.

Let us now look at what effect this total commitment to oil as the only source of energy can have on Northern Canada.

It has become fashionable in the public media that when there is a public discussion of energy in Northern Canada, it is always understood that the oil reserves must be taken from Northern Canada for the use of people in southern areas.

I just cannot accept this line of reasoning. For one thing, as we all know, oil is a non-renewable resource and there are just not unlimited resources of oil in the Canadian Arctic.

Secondly, as a Northerner, I resent the audacity of that assumption. An energy policy for the North must, first and foremost, take into consideration the needs of the people living in the North Anything less is simple ignorance and leads to exploitation, frustration, and bitterness.

What effect will the Pipeline have on the people of the North?

The Native people of the North West Territories are deeply concerned about the effects this Pipeline will have on their environment. I have personally campaigned in two elections on this issue. I can tell you how much the native peoples feel for the land which is the source of their livelihood.

The Native people are very concerned that their way of life will be changed permanently. Nothing the government has said or done so far has even begun to calm their fears.

As you know, the tundra is a delicate covering insulating the perma-frost. This is threatened by the establishment of the Pipeline. An example of what can happen occurred in the Tucktoyakuk area where there still remains a no-man's land of gullies that are of no use to anybody.

If we swallow this promise of prosperity that is at the very doorstep of the Canadian North, what benefit can the Native peoples expect? Job opportunities? Let me give you a few examples:

First of all, Imperial Oil established drilling operations at Norman Wells over 40 years ago. Out of a present community of about 200, only one Metis is employed permanently.

There is a pipeline operating at Pointed Mountain, Ft. Liard. Not one native person is employed there. To be fair, the company did employ native people to help clear the brush before commencing operations.

Earlier I mentioned that the Canadian government explore alternatives energy policies for Canadians in settled regions. Let me now list a few suggestions for alternative energy resources for the people living in the North.

Of course, we in the North, can always hope that the oil consortium as a demonstration of its good corporate citizenship, will set up a free fuel system for the people of the North so that we can benefit from the natural resources of our land for the few years before the supply runs out.

We are optimistic...but we are also a self-reliant people.

One suggestion for meeting the energy needs of the North is to look at the lumbering possibilities. This is not a new idea by any means. In Old Crow in the Yukon, a school is heated by cordwood. This has several advantages. The school employs four firemen to keep it heated. It also provides employment contracts for local people to acquire firewood. The advantages, as I see it, are twofold: firstly, the local people have employment by providing their own energy and not waiting for others to supply it for them; secondly, they are making use of a natural and renewable resource.

In my own riding, I can see great possibilities for forestry in the very same McKenzie Valley that others are so attracted to. Communities such as Arctic Red River, McPherson, Ft. Good Hope, Ft. Norman, Wrigley, Simpson, and Jean-Marie River are all areas with high employment. More than half of the homes there are heated by oil. Why not take a long hard look at using wood as a fuel.

It would provide employment for unskilled workers--workers who would have little chance for permanent employment with the Pipeline. The greatest advantage would be that the money involved would stay in the community. The people of the community would have the final control in supplying their own energy needs. A reduction in unemployment would help alleviate some of the severe mental stresses that people in Northern Canada bear.

Also, the federal government should give serious consideration to proposals put forward in the report of the Northern Canada Power Commission entitled: Southern Great Slave Lake Region Power Potential. There is the potential for supplying enormous energy needs in the Great Slave Lake region and in the northern regions of Alberta and Saskatchewan. The cost is considerable but it would be Canadian tax money spent to meet the energy needs of Canadians--and only Canadians. Another advantage of such a project is that we would be investing in renewable resources.

One final point I would like to make--it represents my whole purpose for being in politics--is to see that no Northern development takes place without a full and just settlement of Native Rights--especially their rights to the land. Only when there has been a just and true settlement of these claims should Canadians begin to develop the Northern regions of their country without feeling ashamed.

But even if these Native claims are honourably settled, it does not mean that the Canadian government can be held back in its enthusiasm to build the Pipeline. However, once the oil supplies of the Canadian Arctic are exhausted, once the Alaskan oil supplies are dry, once we see the Pipeline sitting empty out there on that desecrated tundra, we the Native peoples of the North are anticipating that the Americans with all their needs will not stop there.

There are more treasures in the North and the Native peoples are already planning ahead. That treasure of course is water. ICE-COLD CLEAR WATER from Great Slave Lake, Great Bear Lake, and the McKenzie River. The Americans can recognize a bargain when they see one and we must plan ahead.

I can promise you this. The Native people will not let this water supply go as easily and cheaply as the Canadian government intends to sell our oil and gas supplies.

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